

## **3.2 Summary of Freight Rail Breakout Session**

***Conference on Updating the Louisiana Statewide Transportation Plan  
July 31 – August 1, 2000  
New Orleans Marriott***

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This document summarizes the items discussed during the Freight Rail Breakout Session held on July 31 and August 1, 2000. This Breakout Session, which was one of the six sessions held for the various transportation modes, served as an important component of the first *Conference on Updating the Louisiana Statewide Transportation Plan* held at the New Orleans Marriott.

The primary purpose of this Breakout Session was to 1) review and validate the freight rail elements included in the 1996 *Louisiana Statewide Intermodal Transportation Plan (SITP)* and related benchmarks included in *Louisiana: Vision 2020*, and 2) identify new or additional strategic issues for consideration in the Plan Update. The related *SITP* items are attached.

Approximately 20 persons attended the Breakout Session, including representatives of four major trunk line railroads, the Public Belt Railroad, LDOTD, municipal officials and transportation industry consultants.

Participants confirmed their support for inclusion of most of the related 1996 *SITP* elements in the Plan Update, with suggested updates and modifications. This Breakout Session addressed sixteen related elements contained in the 1996 *SITP*, as well as several benchmarks included in *Vision 2020*. No changes were suggested for the *Vision 2020* benchmarks. Discussions on the 1996 *SITP* elements are summarized below.

### **R-1 Reorganize DOTD rail activities**

**and**

### **R-3 Expand capability for freight rail project planning, evaluation, and administration**

An existing reorganization and expansion plan awaits a decision by the LDOTD Secretary.

- ❑ The group unanimously agreed that the reorganization plan and expansion should proceed, with appropriate personnel.
- ❑ The group noted that the short line railroads and terminal operators lack grantwriting and preparation capacity and need help.

#### **R-4 Create a revolving loan fund for light density railroad rehabilitation**

The RRIF Federal notice of proposed rulemaking has been adopted.

- ❑ The state needs to “step-up-to-the-plate” just as the Feds are doing, rather than abandon the proposed state program.
- ❑ Short lines and terminal operators need application help.

#### **R-5 Establish a Freight Railroad Intermodal Grant Program**

State funding thus far has been dedicated to sugarcane transport.

- ❑ The lack of an appropriation for this purpose is “lamentable”.
- ❑ The public partner requirement is too restrictive.

#### **R-6 New Orleans East Bridge Junction - Rail Gateway Case Study**

The study is proceeding.

- ❑ The study should be expanded to include the western gateway.
- ❑ Consideration should be given to funding for study findings.
- ❑ Similar problems exist in other areas of the state, and the study should be replicated in those areas.
- ❑ Study findings will undoubtedly have implications for Millennium Port options and should address them.

#### **R-7 Consider public role in enhancing rail access**

A scope of work has been prepared and is awaiting funding.

- ❑ This is a national rather than local issue and should be addressed by the Federal government, not the State. No state funding should be provided.

**I-1 Improve coordination among intermodal planning and program management systems while preserving and enhancing modal identity**

The reorganization of LDOTD is complete with the exception of the rail section.

- Participants called for greater freight/passenger rail integration/cooperation.

**I-2 Develop a program of public education, marketing and promotion of intermodalism**

A prototype web page/internet site has been developed.

- Proceed - incorporate all modes.
- Add a Job Mart segment.
- Add organizational links - public and private.
- Accomplish via DED or LA, Inc.

**I-3 Expand railroad/highway grade crossing program**

Funding (federal and state match) has been expanded from \$3M to \$9M (FY 2000).

- This is the #1 priority regarding rail in Louisiana.
- Funding levels are woefully short of addressing the problem.
- Tap other funding sources through cooperation with surface highway/ITS initiatives.
- Local planning needs to address RR crossings.
- State planning legislation required to force local governments to address grade crossing issues.

**I-5 Develop and implement a statewide policy relating intermodal transportation planning with economic development objectives**

A contract has been issued to UNO/LSU to evaluate the economic development impact of transportation infrastructure investment.

- ❑ Endorsed without comment.

#### **I-6 Establish a statewide Intermodal Transportation Economic Development Program for industrial recruitment and expansion**

The Economic Development Awards Program (EDAP) administered by DED fulfills intent but with limited funding.

- ❑ Funding should be increased.
- ❑ The program should be marketed aggressively by DED/LA, Inc.
- ❑ The Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) should be involved.

#### **I-7 Establish a program to acquire/preserve abandoned railroad right-of-way**

FRA required freight rail plan is included in the Statewide Transportation Plan Scope of Work. No funds are currently available for program.

- ❑ No funding source that would facilitate the acquisition and “banking” of RR ROWs exists, and one is sorely needed.

#### **I-8 Expand public awareness and law enforcement officer training to improve safety at rail highway grade crossings**

Operation Life Saver provides current educational, training, and community outreach program but with limited funding.

- ❑ High priority for increased funding.

#### **I-9 Lobby for release of a significant portion of the Federal Airport and Airways Trust Fund and the Federal Highway Trust Fund to the States**

LDOTD has aggressively pursued. Requires on-going effort. Funding levels are somewhat higher.

- Continue.

#### **I-11 Create an Intermodal Terminal Access Improvement Program**

MPOs are recognizing the importance of intermodal connectors and are beginning to fund some projects. These connectors need to be added to the State System to allow them to compete for funding. Methodology developed through M-3 study can be used to guide specific project funding.

- Proceed with “collector” designations and adoptions by the state system.
- Assist MPOs in developing professional capacity and awareness in this area.

#### **I-13 Upgrade the existing Almonaster Avenue/CSX railroad bridge spanning the Industrial Canal in NO to eliminate operational bottleneck.**

Partially completed, by inclusion in RPC’s TIP. Conceptual design and preliminary environmental assessment complete. Phase 2 design and EIS scheduled to start in Fall 2000. Current estimate is \$45M, federal funding gap is \$12M.

- Endorsed.